



MEDIA RELEASE

30 September 2014

Queensland Ombudsman releases report on strip searches at Townsville Women's Correctional Centre

Queensland Ombudsman Phil Clarke today released the findings of his investigation into Townsville Women's Correctional Centre's practice of routinely strip searching female prisoners receiving a restricted medication.

The Ombudsman found the practice was unreasonable and contrary to law under the Corrective Services Act in the circumstances.

"The centre's 'blanket-approach' of strip searching all prisoners before and after they received a certain type of restricted medication was a disproportionate response to a suspected problem," Mr Clarke said.

The investigation found the practice, introduced in June 2013, was in response to suspected medication diversion by a small number of prisoners.

The Ombudsman found the routine strip searching was unreasonable because the centre failed to consider other less invasive measures and did not take into account the known potential negative impacts of strip searches on female prisoners.

"I was particularly concerned to find that the strip search practices adopted at the Townsville Women's Correctional Centre continued for some 10 months without review by the centre or Queensland Corrective Services and only stopped when Ombudsman investigators made inquiries," Mr Clarke said.

"The report's findings and recommendations will help to ensure that inappropriate strip search practices do not occur in Queensland correctional centres in the future."

The Department of Justice and Attorney-General's Director-General, who is responsible for Queensland Correctional Services, which runs the Townsville Women's Correctional Centre, has accepted the recommendations without reservation.

Mr Clarke said he decided to report to Parliament on this investigation because transparency about unlawful and unreasonable practices identified in closed environments, such as correctional centres, was important.

"Strip searches have a significant impact on the dignity of prisoners and should only be used in appropriate circumstances."

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The Queensland Ombudsman is an independent officer of the Parliament and ensures public agencies make fair and balanced decisions for Queenslanders by investigating complaints and conducting own-initiative investigations to tackle broader, systemic concerns.

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The report is available to download at www.ombudsman.qld.gov.au.

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